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Compulsory school attendance in Alaska. Letter from the Secretary of the Interior, transmitting with approval a copy of a bill prepared by the Commissioner of Education providing for enforcing regular attendance at the government schools in the Territory of Alaska, together with certain letters stating the necessity of such legislation

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COMPULSORY SCHOOL ATTENDANCE IN ALASKA.

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L E T T E R

FROM

THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR,

TRANSMITTING

*With approval a copy of a bill prepared by the Commissioner of Education providing for enforcing regular attendance at the Government schools in the Territory of Alaska, together with certain letters stating the necessity of such legislation.*

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APRIL 12, 1890.—Referred to the Committee on the Territories.

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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR,  
Washington, April 11, 1890.

SIR: I have the honor to transmit with my approval the draught of a bill prepared by the Commissioner of Education providing for enforcing regular attendance at the Government schools in the Territory of Alaska, together with a copy of a letter from the Commissioner of Education of the 8th instant to this Department, and also of one of date June 21, 1880, from Hon. John H. Keatley, lately United States district judge and president of the Territorial board of education in Alaska to the late Commissioner of Education, showing the importance of the legislation contemplated in the bill.

Very respectfully,

JOHN W. NOBLE,  
Secretary.

The SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES.

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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR,  
BUREAU OF EDUCATION,  
Washington, April 8, 1890.

SIR: I have the honor to submit for your consideration, to be forwarded, if approved by you, for the consideration of Congress, a draught of "An act providing for a regular attendance upon the Government schools in Alaska," together with a letter favoring such a measure, addressed to my predecessor by the Hon. John H. Keatley, lately United States district judge and president of the Territorial board of education in Alaska.

I have the honor to be, sir, your obedient servant,

W. H. HARRIS,  
Commissioner.

The SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR,

TERRITORIAL BOARD OF EDUCATION,  
*Sitka, Alaska, June 21, 1889.*

HONORABLE AND DEAR SIR: The Territorial board of education, at its regular semi-annual meeting, June 14, 17, 18, and 19, unanimously passed the following resolution:

"Whereas it is the invariable experience of all who have been engaged or interested for years in the difficult task of attempting to educate and civilize the natives and creoles of Alaska, that the greatest obstacles to success are, first, the want of adequate means of securing the regular and general attendance of the children of these people at the various Government schools, and second, the stolid indifference, superstition, and fear of change on the part of the greater number of the parents of such children; and

Whereas experience has also demonstrated that wherever native policemen have been employed and paid heretofore a moderate compensation for gathering these children into the school-rooms and thus compelling attendance, not only is the average attendance itself largely increased, but an interest in the progress of the pupils and the success of the schools themselves has been gradually and permanently created in those native and creole parents; and

Whereas the Government of the United States is annually appropriating large sums of money for the purpose of educating and civilizing these people, and employing competent and zealous teachers for that purpose, who are making great sacrifices by enduring severe privations, general discomfort, and personal isolation among an alien and barbarous race of people: Therefore be it

*Resolved*, By the Territorial board of education that the Hon. Lyman E. Knapp, the governor of the District of Alaska, is hereby requested and urged to embody in his forthcoming annual report to the Department of the Interior the suggestions we have made herein, with the recommendation that the Congress take the subject of compulsory education of the natives and creoles of Alaska into consideration, and in addition to making the usual appropriations for the schools of the District, add thereto such enactments as will compel the regular attendance of the pupils at such schools as are already established or may be hereafter provided.

*Resolved*, That the general agent of education in Alaska, and the secretary of this board furnish to Governor Knapp such data from the reports in his custody of the various schools in the district and from the other records of the board, as may be necessary to bring this subject clearly and succinctly before the Department of the Interior and the Congress of the United States.

*Resolved*, That a copy of this memorial be forwarded to the Commissioner of Education, that he may be advised of the foregoing and his co-operation be respectfully requested therein.

Very truly, yours,

JOHN H. KEATLEY,  
*President*  
 SHELDON JACKSON,  
*Secretary.*

Hon. N. H. R. DAWSON,  
*United States Commissioner of Education.*

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AN ACT providing for a regular attendance at the Government schools in Alaska.

SECTION 1. Every parent, guardian, or other person having control or charge of any child of the age of seven years and under the age of ten, residing within one mile, and of any child between the ages of ten and sixteen residing within two miles of any school in Alaska, established and maintained in whole or in part by the Government, shall send such child to such school during the whole period that it is in session, unless it can be satisfactorily shown before the proper magistrate that such child is physically or mentally disabled.

SEC. 2. It is hereby expressly provided that parents, guardians, or others having control of a child shall be allowed, when they so prefer, to place such child in other than Government schools, provided such schools teach in the English language at least the common-school branches of reading, spelling, writing, arithmetic, grammar, geography, and temperance hygiene.

And when parents, guardians, or others having control of a child, places the child in other than Government school, they shall give notice of the same in writing to the teacher of the nearest school, stating the name and age of the child and the name of the school to which the child is sent.

And the provisions of section 1, regarding continuous attendance, shall be in force in the private or other school to which the child is sent.

SEC. 3. It is hereby further provided that when the presence and services of any child

of school age are necessary to the care, comfort, and protection of such parent or guardian in case of accident, sickness, or any physical or mental infirmity, and the same is proven to the United States commissioner or other magistrate resident in his district, that the said United States commissioner or magistrate shall have the power to give the said child written permission to be absent from school for a certain definite period of time.

SEC. 4. For every neglect of the duty imposed by this act, the person offending shall be guilty of a misdemeanor and shall, on conviction, forfeit and pay for the use of the school fund of the Territory a fine of one dollar for the first offense, two dollars for the second offense, three dollars for the third offense, and five dollars for each subsequent offense, and in default of the payment of any such fine, or any part thereof, such person shall stand committed one day for each dollar of said fine remaining unpaid: *Provided, however,* that before such penalty shall be incurred, the parent, guardian, or other person liable therefor, shall have the matter explained to him and shall have an opportunity by complying with the requirements of this act, then and thereafter to avoid the imposition of such penalty.

SEC. 5. To the end that these regulations may be enforced, the deputy United States marshal, local constable, and police are hereby authorized and empowered, and it is hereby made their duty to see that all children of school age within the prescribed limits are in school.

It is also made their duty to report to the United States commissioner or other magistrate the parent, guardian, or others having control of children of school age, who fail to send them to school in accordance with the provisions of sections 1 and 2.

SEC. 6. It shall also be the duty of each teacher to report all absentees to the United States commissioner or other magistrate.

SEC. 7. It is hereby made the duty of the United States commissioner or other magistrate, when officially informed by the deputy marshal, local constable, policeman, or teacher of the absence of a child from school without written permission, to issue a warrant for the arrest of (to cause to appear before them) said parent, guardian, or other person in control of the absentee and give him a speedy trial.

And if said parent, guardian, or other party having control of the absentee, fails to convince the court of the reasonableness of the absence, then he shall be punished as provided in section 4.

SEC. 8. At the commencement of each school year the principal teacher of each school shall make out a register of all the children of the district within the prescribed ages, adding to the same from time to time as new families move into the district.

And in the preparation of this register the teacher is hereby authorized to employ school time not exceeding three days.

SEC. 9. In each school district where there are no officers to serve warrants, make arrests and carry out the provisions of this act, the United States Commissioner of Education is empowered to employ a native policeman, who shall be paid out of the educational fund.

